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# ARTS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

## A LECTURE

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE SOCIETY FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF  
THE FINE ARTS

BY

W. M. FLINDERS PETRIE

AUTHOR OF "THE PYRAMIDS AND TEMPLES OF GIZEH;" "INDUCTIVE METROLOGY;"  
"STONEHENGE," ETC.

LONDON

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1884

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*As this lecture is not published by its author, he being in Egypt, it has not received his final revision.*

*Also the appended announcements of works, and the press notices quoted, are published without his supervision.*

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## THE ARTS OF ANCIENT EGYPT.

A LECTURE DELIVERED BEFORE THE SOCIETY FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF  
THE FINE ARTS, 19TH APRIL, 1883.

IN considering the subject of the Arts of Ancient Egypt, it is hard to know what particular aspect of it is best to take up for a general statement, such as the present. For my own part, I have mainly examined Egyptian Art for its historical value; and this alone is a wide subject, as wide as Italian Art, including Etruscan, Roman, and Romanesque. The technical arts also require notice, as well as Art in the abstract; the means should be considered as well as the results.

It will perhaps be best, therefore, after mentioning some prevalent misconceptions on the subject, and pointing to the historical questions involved, to take each of the great periods of Art in Egypt, and sketch out its leading characteristics, to endeavour to give an idea of its tone and feeling; and after that, to show in what way the artists were enabled to produce such results, and what were their technical means.

Egyptian Art first became familiar to modern minds through the labours of the great French expedition, at the beginning of this century. The Academicians were familiar with classical forms; they had been brought up in an atmosphere of Telemachus and Belisarius, and had their impressions sharpened by the classic fashions of the Revolution. It is not to be wondered at, then, if they hailed with delight, and carefully represented, every fragment of Greek or Roman work that they met with, fragments which seem worthless to us by the side of the greater interests with which we are now familiar; and they naturally understood and most appreciated those forms and that period of Egyptian Art in which Greek influence is most apparent. They popularised the great temples built by those prolific builders, the Ptolemies; and Denderah, Edfou, Esneh, and



Philæ, became known as the representatives of Egyptian building, sculpture, and decoration. In their ignorance at that time of hieroglyphic reading, they assigned a fabulous antiquity to some of these structures, and to all the world it seemed as if they then knew the genius of Egypt.

But they were far from it; they had only reached back to the latest development of that architecture, and their drawings show how lamentably they had failed to appreciate truly Egyptian form. There is a sort of caricature expression in their work whenever they attempt a face, or even a decoration, which is not under Greek influence. And the magnificent plates in which they published their drawings have unhappily been copied again and again in even a poorer manner in later works. It is no easy thing for an artist accustomed to western figures to seize the true character of an Egyptian face of any period; and not only is the great French work a mere travesty of the real style, but in most of the recent books on Egypt there is scarcely a single face or attitude copied as an Egyptian artist would have drawn it. Our ideas should be formed entirely from the original sculptures, in the midst of the colouring and forms among which they were designed; or at least in our museums, and from the excellent photographs now so easily obtained.

To the epoch of the French work succeeded that of Wilkinson and Lepsius. The first of these explorers was essentially a Greek, delighting in Greek names for the gods and kings, and referring on every subject to the Greek accounts belonging to the last age of the Egyptian monarchy; and though he did a great work in familiarising English minds with Egyptian ways, and raised our knowledge of them from dry history into a social acquaintance, yet "the Ancient Egyptians" was a phrase which covered, without distinction, epochs thousands of years apart. The German expedition really first entered on the oldest remains, and yet after their labours, almost down to the present day, the general idea of Egyptian Art would perhaps be most fully illustrated by referring to Karnak or Abu Simbel. When continued exploration, within the last twenty years, brought to light so many of the works of the earliest period, there was a general cry of astonishment, that has scarcely ceased in Egyptological circles, and scarcely yet penetrated



to popular perception. "What an unlooked-for style! How different from all that we know! How realistic! How natural!" Such was the greeting of the earliest statues when they appeared to modern eyes. But what does this greeting mean? It means that we were till this in the dark as to the true character of native Egyptian Art; that what we had thought to be the essential and original features of the style, were merely the accretions and developments of it; accretions due to foreign influence, and developments due to various amalgamations. We had looked on monstrosities and gloominess as the peculiarities inherent in the country; we now find that, so far from this, "sweetness and light" seem to have been the ideal of the primitive race, before Semitic horrors or Greek voluptuousness had ruled its style.

To judge of the Art of any nation or period, we must take into consideration the circumstances by which it was surrounded, and the intentions which guided the use of it. Egyptian work is essentially monumental; it is to their regard for death rather than their love of this life that we owe their greatest works; not that they were therefore gloomy, but they prepared for their death in order to insure their happiness in a resurrection; and in this spirit one of the early kings called his pyramid "the place of refreshing—or coolness." With a monumental object then in view, it was but suitable that a fixed pose and a calm expression, free from the passions and troubles of the world, should have been aimed at by the artists; and the sole attention to this ideal had doubtless a considerable effect in checking the national imagination, and stereotyping its forms.

But to understand the genius of Egyptian Art it is most necessary to realise the climate and the country. No amount of sculptures seen under our dull skies, and amidst our modern civilisation, can make us see the absolute fitness of the style, and the impossibility of anything else being as suitable for its native place. A Greek statue in Egyptian surroundings looks as incongruous as an Egyptian—or, still worse, a mock-Egyptian—figure in Piccadilly. The glowing forms of Greece, instinct with action and life, are born of a country of wooded mountains, and running streams; but in Egypt the different conditions necessarily

produce different Art. The great feature of the country is the vast and ever-present desert; wherever you may stand in the old part of Egypt—the Nile valley—the desert is always seen within a few miles on either side; in every part of that long course which the Nile runs for hundreds of miles, the desert is on your right hand and your left; and the only place where any living thing can grow is on the mud which fills the old bed of the river. Egypt proper, apart from the Delta, is merely the bottom of a dried-up river-bed, or estuary, scored out in the plateau of limestone and sandstone which rises in cliffs on each side of it; and through this mud meanders the stream which but for a part of the year rises to fill its former limits. The cliffs are of varying height, sometimes only a hundred feet, oftener three to six hundred feet, and sometimes even a thousand, above the bed of the river which they overlook. Their bases are cumbered with débris, and their sides are scored with deep valleys, ploughed even a mile back through the limestone by former torrents, which dashed down in waterfalls, scooping out deep basins in the rock, and leaving precipices which it is impossible to ascend. Once on the top of these cliffs, it may be hours before any part can be found by which the valley can be reached again. These utterly bare scarped and scored precipices are always the horizon of the dwellers in the fertile flat; and in the presence of such masses it would seem impossible to put sculpture that was merely elegant or beautiful. A gigantic, everlasting pile of masonry, with figures serene and imperturbable, is the only human work that could harmonize with such a background. But though the desert is thus severe and stern, the green strip of the valley which winds through it is of the brightest and freshest colour. No English meadow can show a more brilliant green than that of the clover or beans which flourish in the black and fertile soil. And it was in the green pastures that the primitive Egyptians delighted; the desert was under the power of Typhon, was unclean, evil; but everything of life, animal and vegetable, was what they rejoiced in. Above this rich plain of verdure rises the deep blue sky, in which day after day the sun, ever unclouded, is seen from rising to setting. The splendour of the Egyptian sunsets yields a variety of tints to which we are unaccustomed in



this country. As the sun nears the horizon the eastern cliffs of the valley appear rich in yellow light with purple shadows, deepening to crimson at sunset; there rises a bright rosy band across the eastern sky, higher and higher as the light wanes, with the dark blue of night below it, and the brightness of day still above. This fades as it nears the zenith, and then the western sky from a golden glow darkens to a rich tawny-brown, fading into purple, and so to blue, on either side; this brown, however, never gives place to blue, but gradually becoming spangled with the stars it deepens to the blackness of night. Such is the regular course of an Egyptian sunset, constant, week after week, in cloudless splendour; and in these surroundings of rich fertility, yet bounded by desert precipices, on ground saturated by the great river, yet under a burning sun, was Egyptian Art developed in perfect accordance with its country and its climate;—massive, yet covered with delicate sculpture,—deeply shadowed, yet bright with colour.

Some years ago an authority on such matters lamented that the British Museum should exhibit so many specimens of inferior Art; specimens which attracted the attention of the students from the standard examples more suited for training their tastes and skill. Now this complaint arose from looking only at one side of the subject, and it is sometimes met with in other forms. It results from a confusion between Art as an end and Art as a means. We have, happily, two separate museums established for these separate views. The British Museum is essentially historical; it treats Art as a means, and would lose its importance and its true functions if anything were slighted there because it was not beautiful or calculated to form the artistic tastes of students. In fact, why drawing students should not have a special museum of their own it is hard to see; a collection of casts would be rather their proper field for training. On the other hand, at South Kensington, Art as end is the principle of the collection. These two different views require to be always carefully separated; and because Egyptian Art does not agree with our notions in many points, it is none the less important and worthy of study. Sometimes the opinion is expressed, that if a thing be, according to our tastes, ugly or barbaric, it cannot teach us; and that we should do better to give our atten-

tion to forms whose beauty is unexceptionable. But Art is not only an end in itself; it is the most valuable aid to history that we possess. The history of a period, without a sympathy with the feelings and imaginations of the living people that we read of, is a mere collection of barren facts; and if we want to understand how and why certain events happened, we must get at the minds that guided them. Now for this end Art is the great means; including in Art every product of the imagination—drawing, sculpture, colouring, music, fiction, and poetry—for all are equally branches of Art. We should have present to the mind the architecture, the decorations, the colouring, the fancies of a period, when we are reading its history. Such things—the Art of a period as a whole—are the mental imagery by which we dramatise narratives in our minds as we read them. It is evident, then, that the more thoroughly we can for the time being identify ourselves with any period, the better we shall understand it, and our aim should be to become so imbued with its style and tone that any incongruity will strike us as an intrusion; and that whatever belongs to the age considered, shall be in harmony with our perceptions of it. It is only by throwing the mind as far as possible into the spirit of the age that we are contemplating, that we can hope to realise the true character of it, and the aspect in which its people looked at their own life.

Egyptian Art may be broadly divided into four great periods—Native, Asiatic, Renascence, and Græco-Egyptian—during its course of over two thousand years, or, as some authorities would say, over four thousand years. These periods may be briefly defined as follows. (1) The Native Art, which begins with the earliest known remains, and extends to the thirteenth dynasty, embracing the times of the Old and Middle Kingdoms. (2) The Asiatic, or Semitic Egyptian Art, which began to influence native design as early as the twelfth dynasty, say 2,000 or 2,500 B.C., which rose to its full power under the Semitic invaders, and the Semitic fashions of Egypt during the empire, the eighteenth to twentieth dynasties, say 1,600 to 1,200 B.C., and which waned under the papacy of the high-priests of Amun, the twenty-first dynasty, 1,000 B.C. (3) The Renascence of Native Art, which rose into its position again as the Semitic



tastes decayed, beginning feebly under the twenty-second dynasty, 900 B.C., rising to full force under the twenty-sixth dynasty, 600 B.C., and lasting through the Persian conquest to the thirtieth dynasty, 350 B.C., only to be eclipsed by Greek influence. (4) The Græco-Egyptian Art, which began under Ptolemaic rule, 300 B.C., and lasted in the temple of Esneh as late as 250 A.D. For Egyptian Art and religion did not perish by the influence of Greece and Rome; they were, on the contrary, fostered and strengthened by those civilisations, though in a modified form. It was Christianity that abolished the worship of Ptah and Osiris, yet it did not die. Isis and Horus had not ruled in vain for two thousand years, and the Madonna and Child show us still their old forms.

Taking first, then, the Native Art, let us try to form an estimate of its true character, though in some respects our knowledge is still very incomplete. Considering, however, what great changes certainly were made in Art in later times, it will be most suitable not to credit it in the early period with any ideas or forms but what can be actually proved to have belonged to it. Its principal characteristics are its freshness and naturalness, the absence of gloominess or mysticism, and a general air of stir and business in the life of each class. It is true that the great nobles sit at ease in their carved chairs, each with his wife beside him, the wife's hand generally on her husband's shoulder. But then these men had the administration of vast estates to manage, and probably attended to their affairs pretty closely; there is not a chamberlain or steward to whom accounts are rendered, but each of the scribes sits before the great man, rendering the accounts in person. Thus their ideal of life was one of action rather than of idle pleasure; and whoever is represented, be it clerk, overseer, or labourer, every man is actively employed.

In other countries monuments representing figures in action usually detail processions or conflicts, whether the Art be in Nineveh, Athens, or Rome, or even among the later Egyptians. But active daily work—the business of life—with the accidents and even the faults of the men and their animals, was the favourite subject of Native Art in Egypt. We must realise this love of vitality in their ideas in order to understand their rendering of their sculpture.

As there is scarcely any need for me to repeat, each great man was occupied throughout his life in excavating in rock, or else constructing, one or more accessible chambers, and then providing a deep shaft in the rock, opening into a rock-hewn chamber, from 50 to 100 feet below the ground, in which the coffin was to be placed at his burial. These accessible chambers or chapels were always decorated if the owner lived long enough, and sometimes were highly elaborated; it is on their walls that we see the fulness of detail which places the life of four thousand years ago so vividly before us.

In the drawing of the figures we see little of that conventionality of attitude which is often considered to belong to Egyptian work. The men are represented in almost every position, as may be seen in the well-known tomb of Ti at Sakkara; some men are beating their donkeys, others are loading the sheaves of corn on their beasts, and one donkey, with an ear cocked a little backward, walks with just the patient and sagacious look of the modern asses. When a load became loose, owing to bad cording, there follows a scene only too common in the present day: two men rush to catch the falling load and right it, a third grips the donkey's tail with one hand, while with the other he steadies the load at the top, and a fourth man, hearing the cry, has turned round, and catching the donkey's head under his arms, helps in stopping the beast by thrusting him back. The naturalness of the whole group is unsurpassable. All the figures are in true side view, and it would tax any artist to give the scene with more accuracy, and the grouping with greater clearness. Each action is true to nature, and perhaps the absolute necessity of stopping a donkey by main force when a load begins to fall, catching both his head and tail, can hardly be realised without having seen the very thing acted by modern donkeys and modern Egyptians. This may be taken as a typical example of the light-hearted love of a joke which is as natural to the modern as it was to these early Egyptians; in the present day any little accident or absurdity will make the most sullen-looking man join in a hearty laugh.

The many other occupations are all as freely sketched out. Throwing the sheaves into the granary, the women winnowing, the boat-building, the sawyers and carpenters;



one cowherd milking the cows, while another holds the calf by the legs, the fisher spearing the fish, or emptying out a fish-trap of woven reeds, the poultry keeper stuffing fattening balls down the throat of the goose, or feeding the cranes: the snaring of the wild fowl in large nets, which required half-a-dozen men to work them; the cooks dressing the meat, roasting the fowls, or making bread; all these occupations are shown with an evident love of the work, and an inimitable truth of action. The care with which the muscles are worked out in the best sculpture is worthy of notice; in the figure of the well-fed master tranquilly superintending, they scarcely show, but in the active labourers the principal muscles of the legs and arms are well indicated, naturally, and without that exaggeration so prominent in the Assyrian style.

Though the human figures are thus realistic in their action, the animals are, if possible, still better drawn; and the artists certainly took a greater liberty of expression in representing them. The love for animals, shown by the great extent of their domestication, also appears in the careful copying of every attitude and action from birth to death. As her calf is carried in front of her on the cowherd's back, the cow looks up at it with her tongue half out, longing to lick it. The eland suckling her young; the obstreperous crane caught by the throat, while another crane, trying to pick a quarrel with it, is fenced off by the keeper with a staff; the calves in the pastures, tethered, but skipping about with their tails flourishing in the air; the fowls carried by the wings kicking and screeching; the great fat goose, which seems in many establishments to have been grown as a prize specimen, and which needed a man's whole care and attention to carry it, riding calmly in his arms, as if aware of its importance; and the prize oxen, each of them with its own keeper, and decorated with a grand neck-band, patterned in red and green, with tassels and fringes; in all these the old Egyptians delighted. Indeed, the extent of their domestication of animals apparently exceeds that among any other people in ancient or modern times; in the earliest days the pet cur accompanied his master about the estate, or sat by his chair in the house, wearing a neck ribbon and bows, and sometimes it was the pet monkey that was equally a favourite. Dogs of various

breeds, baboons, hyænas, hedgehogs, jerboas, and many other animals were kept as pets: even captive lions are represented, while among the regular farm stock were oxen and goats of several varieties, antelopes, gazelles, cranes, herons, swans, geese, ducks, and pigeons. It would require a zoologist to identify the many varieties of antelopes, gazelles, and other horned animals which were under complete domestication by the old Egyptians, and owned in herds of thousands together.

This love of animals, and delight in their management and representation, show us much of the character of the people—kindliness, patience, energy, and skill, and a hearty love of life and nature.

But when the lord of all this wealth was to be represented sitting in his place of rest, awaiting his resurrection, a calm contentment must be expressed in his figure; and in the grand statue of Khafra at Bulak, the expression is of dignified and intellectual repose. His face is full of character and meaning; it shows thought and far-seeing intelligence, realising that the welfare and management of the nation rested on his guidance, yet a satisfaction in his own sense of capacity, and the whole lighted up by a shrewd and almost humorous turn of the mouth. He was evidently a man to be revered and obeyed, yet not to be feared or dreaded. The fitness of the character to the position of the man is as apparent as it is in two other statues, Ra-hotep and Nefert, also at Bulak. Here Ra-hotep, the king's son, has not this perfectly capable absolutism; he is responsible, and feels and knows his responsibility; he is a man that will do his best, and his best taxes his care and attention. But his wife sits complacent and happy, care is not hers, nor the need of skill and management; she is beautiful, adorned, and contented in her position. Again at Bulak we see another character, not the absolute, nor the responsible, but the busy official. The marvellously life-like figure of Ra-em-ka—known commonly as the "Shekh el Beled," or the "wooden man"—is one of the masterpieces of representation; the slight strut, the active, eager face, the good humour—almost jocular—of the mouth, and the go of the whole figure, are all in perfect keeping with the character of a man who obeys as well as commands, not revered like the king, but accustomed to respect and obedience from his



subordinates. Each of these four figures, Khafra, Ra-hotep, Nefert, and Ra-em-ka, is a masterpiece of expression, not merely a life-like image of the man, but an artistic rendering of his character; a seizing of his typical moods and a blending of his different expressions are here. The artists possessed the true spirit of portraiture, both of body and of mind, and have left us as speaking a likeness of the whole man as in modern work. The best piece of sculpture of this period that is to be seen in the British Museum, is the head of a wife on one of the large "false doors," at the end of the Egyptian gallery; it is peculiarly sweet and life-like.

But these bright, active, and far-seeing men of the old kingdom were adepts not only in artistic skill, but also in invention and in the mechanical resources required for their great conceptions. Their architectural ideas were equalled in excellence by the manner in which they are carried out; and the designers boldly planned the largest buildings, and completed them with magnificence and skill. The ability shown in the constructive work of the Pyramids of Gizeh, particularly the Great Pyramid, is astonishing: and, in some respects, the means employed are still a problem for the modern engineer. The exquisite working of the surfaces of the stones, and the closeness of the joints—in all cases a sign of good work—are there seen in the highest perfection; and the masses of stone (dozens of blocks weighing about fifty tons each) and their arrangement, not only in open places, but in very confined spaces where many men could not act together, betoken a fearless skill in their gigantic work. In the lesser arts of life they also showed their ability. Their boats on the Nile were of a larger size than those now on that river; reckoning by the rowers, there were boats much over 100 feet in length, some being shown with as many as thirty men on a side, and propelled with such power as to need five steersmen with their broad oars to control the boat. Their sails were square, the yard being braced from the top of the cabin, to obtain the greatest hold on it, and reefing was done by raising a spar on the bottom of the sail, which slid up and down the mast, and was held by ropes passing through blocks at the mast-head. When going with the stream the sails were taken down altogether, as in the present day, and the yards and mast rested on forks which held them up above the cargo,

and which also served to steady the cargo in loading. Thus, on the water they showed their ready design and power of combination as on the land. Their handiwork of spinning and weaving was superior to that of their successors, one of the finest pieces of linen known being that of the wrappings of King Pepi, of the sixth dynasty: and they also excelled in delicate engraving, as may be seen on the hard stones used in the Old Kingdom.

Lastly, we will notice the lesser changes that occurred during this period of Native Art. Of the first three dynasties we have not a fragment remaining that can be dated with any certainty, though a few tombs have been attributed to the third dynasty, and scarcely any of the kings' names of this period are given in any monument or writing until much later times. It is only with Seneferu, the last king of the third, or first of the fourth dynasty, that our monumental history begins. The tombs of his reign, at Medum, are remarkable for the large, bold execution of the inscriptions, and, above all, for the almost unique system of inlaying the figures of the owners in coloured pastes; not satisfied with carving the figures in low relief and colouring them, they hollowed out the figures to about an inch in depth, and providing the socket or recess with an abundance of keying holes to retain the plaster, they filled in the forms with red, yellow, blue, and other pastes, slightly convex above the surface of the wall around. Thus, wear and rubbing would freshen rather than injure the colouring. The outside of these tombs were ornamented with the usual vertical grooves that belong to all the early surface decoration, and it is from one of these groups that the brilliant statues of Ra-hotep and Nefert were obtained.

In the fourth dynasty the inscriptions are still simple, but not quite so plain and bold as on the tombs at Medum. Statues nearly detached from the rock in which they are cut are frequently met with in the tombs; in one tomb at Gizeh are as many as twenty-four statues, mostly life-size, as well as a quantity of wall sculptures in low relief. Apparently the statues and reliefs were always coloured, though on many of them only traces of colour can now be seen. The building was of the highest class, but in all cases it was in imitation of rock-hewn work; whether in a tomb, in a pyramid, or in a temple, the ideal aimed at was

to simulate sculpture in the solid rock, and to hide all structural details in one smooth surface of massive stone.

In the fifth dynasty more elaboration is seen, along with a deterioration from the high standard of the earlier work. The pyramids instead of being well-laid piles of square-hewn stone, were built with retaining walls which were filled up with rubble. But the decoration and sculpture of the tombs is more varied and interesting, and it is to this dynasty that we owe the fulness of detail of early life and occupations. The tombs of Imeri and Aseskafankh at Gizeh, and of Ti and Ptah-hotep at Sakkara, are among the most remarkable for showing the trades and farming of the country, organized under the great nobles.

In the sixth dynasty deterioration in building extended farther, and the pyramids are, in their bulk, mere heaps of mud and chips, though cased and lined with the same fine stone as the earlier structures. Long inscriptions now begin to come into fashion, and columns of hieroglyphics may be seen on both biographical and religious subjects, equal in the number of words to many pages of a printed book. Somewhat of leanness and poverty in the look of the work may be observed in comparison with the richness of the fifth, or the plainer magnificence of the fourth dynasty.

Of the seventh to the tenth dynasties we know practically nothing. Apparently a period of civil war succeeded the sixth dynasty, and then in the Delta the rival Semitic dynasties of the ninth and tenth reigned contemporaneously with the seventh and eighth dynasties who ruled in Egypt proper. It is to this troubled period that we should probably ascribe the fierce destruction of much of the royal work of the preceding dynasties. The kings' names are chipped out of the inscriptions, and their statues smashed to powder, and there seems to have been a personal vengeance dealt out on their monuments.

Belonging almost entirely to the style of the Old Kingdom are the tombs at Beni Hassan, of the twelfth dynasty, commonly called the Middle Kingdom. (I purposely avoid the terms Old and Middle Empire, as no empire in the English sense of the word—extended foreign dominion—yet belonged to Egypt.) In these tombs of the nobles, who occupied that part of Egypt under Usertasen I., somewhere before 2,000 B.C., many changes may be seen from



the old style, but still they belong to the same epoch of Art. The long inscriptions of the sixth dynasty are here developed to still greater length, and cover a large part of the walls. At Siut, in tombs of the twelfth and thirteenth dynasties, inscriptions are the sole decoration, and reach from top to bottom of the large chambers like a great sheet of newspaper. The love of animals and of figure decoration was still in full sway at Beni Hassan; and the old representations of dancers and minstrels have developed into lengthy bands of wrestlers, in every imaginable attitude, which cover the whole wall. But the greatest change of all is in the character of the architecture, for architecture it is, although rock-hewn. Until the sixth dynasty—in the Old Kingdom—it had always been the ideal to make building as much like excavation as possible; to hew out their designs in the rock was the aim of the sculptors of those days. Here, though carving in rock, the ideal is building, and the necessary details of building are carefully imitated. The pillars are no longer the plain square monoliths, without capital or variation in their form, as in the built granite temple at Gizeh, which imitates rock-hewing; but here they have an abacus—essentially a feature of building—and their sides taper to the top, so that the abacus outstanding is just equal in breadth to the base of the pillar. There is also another indubitable sign of the building idea in a row of the projecting ends of poles sculptured along the top of the architrave; the only meaning of these would be as representing the poles supporting a roof of reeds; and they were doubtless copied from such a formation in the dwellings constructed of light materials in the plain. Thus the essential idea of the formation of the tomb was changed from excavation to construction in the dark period between the sixth and twelfth dynasties. The obelisk form rises into greater importance in the twelfth dynasty, but it is a truly native idea, as it is represented in hieroglyphics even in the reign of Khufu, and also standing on a basis like a tomb in several later reigns of the fourth and fifth dynasties.

The second period of Egyptian Art is that of Semitic influence; and we should be cautious in estimating the extent of the changes produced, as we can only judge



a feature to be new by our not having met with it before, and a supposed absence of an idea in any period may be merely due to our lack of knowledge. Taking, however, what is known, let us try to judge how much was due to Asiatic influences in the later Art of Egypt. And first observe the extent of Semiticism in the country. The Hyksos were scarcely the beginning of the change, for the ninth and tenth dynasties were of Semites occupying the Delta; and to judge by the dearth of Egyptian monuments at that time, and the great destructions that took place then, these Semitic kings extended their power for some way up the Nile Valley. As we shall see presently, there was a strong Asiatic influence in the Faium in the twelfth dynasty, but only a very slight trace of it as high up the valley as Beni Hassan, where Semitic families are represented as coming to settle in Egypt; and none of it is seen in works of that period at Siut. After this first Semitic influence, the twelfth dynasty tended to restore the old style; but soon the great wave of Semitic conquest burst on Egypt, and the Hyksos brought in their Asiatic customs—religion, thought, and language—which became so firmly rooted in Egypt during the few centuries of their stay, that although the externals decayed and were thrown off in the native Renaissance, yet many of their ideas remained as long as the Egyptian religion lasted. The overthrow of the political power of the Hyksos by the seventeenth and eighteenth dynasties did nothing apparently toward expelling the influence which they introduced. Under the empire, Semitic fashions prevailed. As Brugsch says: "Seti and his race worshipped the foreign gods in the most obtrusive manner, and at the head of them all the Canaanitish Baal-Sutekh, or Set, after whose name his father Ramesses I. had called him Seti." The letters and documents of the time of the Ramessides—the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties—are full of Semitic words; and not only "army," "hero," "head," and "king" are Semitic (like our Norman terms for law and authorities grafted on to the Saxon language), but even the familiar words "house," "door," "spring," "cake," "gold," "to greet," and "to bless" were all commonly taken from Asiatic sources. When we find that the very language of daily life was thus altered, and that among the workmen

employed in sculpture, both high and low, were Semites from the Delta or Syria, we must be prepared to see a corresponding power of Semitic taste in the Art of the nation.

The first great change that we observe is the representation of the gods in human form. Mariette has remarked on "the absence of all representations of the gods as a characteristic sign of the Old and Middle Kingdom," or rather, as we should say, as a characteristic of Native Art, inasmuch as they are peculiar to a style rather than to an epoch. In the period of Native Art, the gods, when mentioned, are always represented by their animals, or with the name spelt out in hieroglyphs, often beside the beast or bird. The jackal stands for Anup, the hawk for Har, the frog for Hekt, the baboon for Tahuti; and Ptah, Asiri, Hesi, Nebhat, Hat-hor, Neit, Khnum, and Amun-hor are all written out phonetically, but never represented in figure.

Among the hundreds of monuments in the valley of the Nile, decorated by Native Art, there is not one with the figure of a god; and it is not till after Semitic influence had begun to work in the country—after the ninth and tenth dynasties—that any figures of gods are found. Even in the other countries ruled by the Egyptians, only two figures of gods are known under the Old Kingdom; these are the figure of Tahuti on the tablet of Khnumu-Khufu in Sinai, and the figures of Khem on tablets of the sixth dynasty in the wild valley of Hamamat, near the Red Sea. In both cases the district was more Semitic than Egyptian.

The first figures of gods known in the Nile Valley, that is, among the native Egyptians, are on the granite obelisk of Begig in the Faium, erected by Usertesen I., of the twelfth dynasty; and here we find the full forms appearing at once, as among the twenty deities, more or less effaced, are Amun, Amun-Hor, Ptah, Ra-Hor, Nebhat, Hesi, Sebak, Tahuti, Khnum, Khem, Mentu, and Safekh. After this, under the thirteenth dynasty, we meet at Konosso with single figures of Khnum, Khem, Neit, and Mentu, and at Sehel the figure of Maut. Thus in the period of pure Native Art, under the Old Kingdom, figures of deities are unknown in Egypt, and the first group that we find



belongs to a period in which Semitic influence had begun to work.

But, beside the introduction of figures, another great change was wrought in Egyptian Art, by the introduction of monstrosities. The peculiar idea of monstrous or unnatural combinations is scarcely known to some nations, though very common in others. Now in the Old Kingdom a dwarf or deformed person is occasionally represented, true to nature; but no combination of forms has been found. The animals shown in scenes of daily life, and even the sacred animals, are all represented naturally, and without any combinations or malformations. But as soon as we find a row of figures of the gods, no fewer than six of them are monstrosities, with heads of the ram, crocodile, hawk, and ibis. And at Beni Hassan, though figures of the gods had not yet reached so far up the valley, into the region of Native Art, yet monstrosities just begin to appear; a panther in a hunting scene having a combination of head and wings growing out of his back. When I say that monsters are unknown in Native Art, I know that I shall be confronted with the sphinx, and asked how monsters can be reckoned foreign with such an early example before us? To this my reply would be that the sphinx is not early, but belongs to the Hyksos, or is possibly due to the Semitic influence which existed under the twelfth dynasty. This is not the place to discuss historical questions. I will merely observe that there is no contemporary evidence of the supposed primeval date of the sphinx. The earliest inscription about it is on a tablet written many centuries after even the Hyksos, and with a fragment of a name which may be that of Khafra; and there is also another tablet written about a thousand years after the Hyksos, from which it is inferred that the sphinx existed long before Khafra. Hence the evidence for its high antiquity is anything but conclusive; and as in the hundreds of inscriptions of the Old Kingdom, which continually tell us of pyramids, obelisks, and temples, not a mention nor a figure of this or any sphinx is to be found,\* there seems but little reason to suppose that the sphinx is

\* The scarabs representing sphinxes, with the names of Ra-kha-ka and Ra-nofer-ka, in the Louvre, are shown to have been made under the eighteenth dynasty, by the fact that scarabs of similar work bear the names of Hatasu and Thothmes III.; sometimes even conjointly with the earlier names.

an exception to the otherwise general rule that monsters are of foreign origin. The first sphinxes to which any date can be assigned are those so frequent in the Hyksos stronghold of Tanis, with heads of Hyksos kings and Hyksos names upon them. The earliest example of a monstrosity that I have yet seen is on a scarab of the eleventh dynasty, which bears two winged human figures. When we look to Asia and see the great hold that monsters had on the Semitic mind—the winged Baalzebub and the fishy Dagon of Syria, and the eagle-headed Nisroch, the winged divinities, the lynx- and lion-headed teraphim, the human-headed bulls, the winged lions, the griffons, and many other monstrous forms of Assyria—we can hardly question the Semitic origin of the figures of monsters in Egypt.

Another foreign introduction was the burial of slave images. In the tombs of the period of the Empire images are generally found, bearing in either hand a hoe, and with a basket on the back; an inscription around them recording that they were to be vivified in the future state, and work for the deceased person, cultivating his fields with the hoes and carrying the earth in the basket. Now these figures, which are found by the hundred in the later times of the Empire, are absolutely unknown in the Old or Middle Kingdom before the Hyksos invasion, and the earliest examples, Dr. Birch thinks, may belong to the eighteenth dynasty—the beginning of the Empire. These figures are evidently cheap substitutes for slaves immolated at the grave of their master, to accompany him to the future world, a substitution in the same spirit as the use of paper dollars by the Chinese in their ancestral offerings. And when we think of the ghastly Scythic funerals described by Herodotus, and consider that during historic times we know the Scythians to have made inroads in the southern parts of Asia, we can hardly fail to regard this ceremonial slave burial appearing first after the Hyksos invasion, as another of the Asiatic ideas imported into Egypt, and perhaps adopted by the Hyksos originally from more northern tribes.

We see, then, that it is to Semitic influence we must look for the new features that we meet in Egyptian Art under the Empire, and that much of what has been considered



peculiarly Egyptian, the animal-headed god, the human-headed sphinxes, the phœnix, the favourite god, Bes (who, as Brugsch says, "was by his origin a pure child of the Semitic race"), the abundant sacrificial figures of slaves, the gloom and hideous monsters of the theologic sculptures, all these are not Egyptian, but, on the contrary, entirely Semitic.

On looking, then, at the Art history of this Asiatic influence, we find the first traces of it under the eleventh and twelfth dynasties. First, the winged figures on a scarab of Ra-kheper-nub. Next the obelisk of Begig, with its animal-headed gods in the twelfth dynasty, showing, probably, that Semitic dynasties of the Delta and Lower Egypt had ranged as far as the Faium, and left a permanent influence there. Beginnings of Semitic changes are seen in a monstrous animal at Beni Hassan; and in the record, thus far up the valley, of a settlement of Asiatics, which probably took place in that neighbourhood. The statues of Sebak Hotep of the thirteenth dynasty in the Louvre are more in the old than in the new style, and are remarkable for the beauty and grace of their work. Then comes the deluge of Hyksos invasion, and Art is nowhere to be found except in some few pieces of Hyksos work at Tanis, conspicuous among which are gigantic sphinxes. It may be said, in short, that the Hyksos way of representing a king was as a human-headed sphinx. Several such, in granite, with the kings' names on them, are known; but not a single royal Hyksos statue of human form has been found. The work of these Hyksos remains is very good, much better than that of many other periods, and though the features are not Egyptian, yet they are handsome of their type, and do not deserve the abuse they sometimes receive. After them began the grandeur of the Empire, when, having expelled the invaders, the Egyptians set forth subduing lands far and near, from Asia Minor to Donkola. The eighteenth dynasty is remarkable for the magnificence of its work. The façade at Déir el Bahari, showing Queen Hatasu's great expedition to fetch plants and animals from Southern Arabia, is a most delicate piece of work, rivalling the sculptures of the Old Kingdom at Sakkara; the figures of men and animals are true in action, but they have not the geniality of the old work; we miss

the little accidents and the by-play of the scenes. The other erections of this glorious queen are also very fine, particularly the two great obelisks with which she adorned the temple at Karnak. The inscription on one of these enormous monoliths of granite, 108 feet in height, records that it was excavated in the quarry, dressed, floated down the Nile, carved all over with hieroglyphics, which are most delicate and highly finished, and finally set in its place, in the course of seven months! Seven years would not seem too long for such a work. Two other square granite pillars with lotus flowers carved on them, erected by the son of Hatasu, at Karnak, are also exquisite pieces of work. One of the greatest works of this dynasty was a vast temple of Amenhotep III., now swept from the ground, probably by Khuenaten, the heretic king; of this scarcely more remains than the two colossi of the plain of Thebes, so familiar to us all. The Art of the early Empire may then be characterized as combining both size and magnificence, with a refinement of taste and execution, and a soundness of work, which is not found in later times. But this eighteenth dynasty closed with a strange revolution, of which we scarcely yet know the history. A heretic king, Khuenaten, renounced the worship of the national gods, destroyed the temples, and even erased the name of Amun wherever he could reach it, in private or public buildings. It is probably to this rage that we should attribute the sweeping away of the great temple of Amenhotep III. at Thebes, and also the ruin of the gigantic work of Tahutmes I., II., and III., and the overthrow of one of the obelisks of Hatasu, at Karnak. But this king not only destroyed, he built; for, regarding the old capital Thebes as defiled, he left it, and established a new capital at Tel-el-Amarna. Here he held his court, and appeared at his balcony with his wife and children showering garlands on his subjects, who came dancing before him. The Art belonging to this revolution is very peculiar. There is a crowding in the inscriptions, the characters of which are nevertheless remarkably clear and thin; and a perfectly new type of face, and also of the figures, which are almost deformed by the excessive fatness of the thighs. There is besides this an outrageous complication of head-dress ornaments; one on the queen's head consisting of no



fewer than three vase-like objects, with a hawk on the top of each, two large royal serpents crowned, four lesser royal serpents, and a close ring of eight more of the same, besides various other details. Another feature peculiar to this time is the abundance of flowers, and the well-executed porcelain models of flowers and fruit in varied colours. Everywhere the sun is the sole object of worship, and with radiating beams, each ending in a hand bearing the emblem of life, the disc stands above the heads of the royal family, and imparts life to the lips of each. With the exception of this symbolism, the general style of the work is very natural, though the execution has a most peculiar mannerism. But, in place of the rural delights of the Old Kingdom sculptures, we have nothing but the adoration of the king at his palace windows, or as he is carried in a gorgeous litter. This strange style, a single chip of which may be easily recognised, lasted only during a few brief reigns. It was soon extinguished, never to rise again, by the bursting in of the nineteenth dynasty, the great Rameside period.

The Empire was in its greatest glory during the nineteenth dynasty, but the Art is not equal to that which went before. The finest work is that of Seti I. at Abydos, but this, though beautiful and delicate in the features, looks stiff and mechanical by the side of the work of Hatasu or Tahutmes I., and it shows the mannerisms which revived under the Greek influence. Next comes the showy style of Ramesses II., who covered Egypt with his works, and covered his works with his names and titles. The decadence in style is beginning now to show, the mechanism of the time of Seti I. descends even to clumsiness, and in looking at the details of even the most imposing of the works—the colossi outside the great temple of Abu Sinbel—the limbs and muscles are as conventional as Assyrian work, and rather coarser. Placed beside the statue of Khafra they look mere dummies. The decorations of the tombs of this period, though brilliantly painted, are poor in drawing, and are executed on a mere face of stucco over a coat of mud, which is plastered on the rudely hewn chamber walls.

The renewed glory of the Empire under Ramesses III., the founder of the twentieth dynasty, is not marked by any

improvement in Art. On the contrary, at Medinet Habu, the scenes are more confused, and the work less delicate, and there is nothing that rises to the level of the best groups of Ramesses II. Straining after effect is also apparent: the captives are represented in groups, painfully hurrying along on tiptoe, dragged by the cords of the king. The hieroglyphics are cut so deeply that the bottoms of the hollows cannot be seen, and the signs appear as mere patches of blackness on the stone, a result which would certainly not have been appreciated by the earlier artists, who lavished so much care on the details of each sign.

Of the later Ramesside kings, and the usurping Priest-kings of the twenty-first dynasty, the work continues to deteriorate, and under Petukhanu and Sesonk is much like that of Ramesses III., only stiffer and more confused.

But as this Semitic influence decayed the old national style and feelings seem to have been rising to the surface again; we first notice this in the revival of many of the old names, and in the earlier and simpler structure of other names, and at last, in the twenty-fourth dynasty, the old taste and style were fairly renewed, and we enter on the third period, the Egyptian Renaissance. It might seem hard to believe that there was a slumbering national feeling below all the Semitic fashions, and we might view the Renaissance as a merely antiquarian revival, had we not the experience of a similar phase in our own history. The Semitic fashions introduced by a conquering race had lasted some eight hundred or a thousand years, as with us the Latin fashions introduced by the Normans have predominated for six or eight hundred years in England, and at last are yielding to the old national feeling and Teutonic tastes. Instead of bringing as much Latin influence into our language as possible, we are now avoiding it as far as we can. It is true we do not yet see a revival of Saxon art and architecture in England, but when we see that the taste for classic literature preceded the rise of classic Art in England by over half a century, that the taste for mediæval writings similarly preceded the revival of Gothic Art, we may surmise that the present taste for Saxon literature will be the forerunner of a revival of Saxon architecture, which would, from its simple, useful, and adaptable nature, be suited to the climate and the people, have a better chance of lasting



among us than any other of the fashions by which we have been distracted. Similar then to our return to the Saxon tongue as far as possible, after the domination of the Latin influence has ceased, we may regard the return of the Egyptians to their Native Art after the Semitic ideas had decayed. The names of the kings, the style of the tomb decoration, and the statuary, from the twenty-fourth to the thirtieth dynasties (interrupted by the Persian invasion of the twenty-seventh dynasty), were all copied from the works of the Old Kingdom, and often in small objects it would be difficult to decide to which period they belonged, were there not generally about the later work an over-elaboration, a polish, and a weakness which betrays it.

After this, Greek power and influence laid hold of Egyptian Art, and impressed it with a type which it had never known before. The colossi are for ever gone, obelisks were stolen to save the labour of making them, no strings of captives adorn the temple walls, no lists of conquered towns are arrayed in triumph, but a monotonous reiteration of offerings to the various divinities by a Ptolemy or a Roman emperor covers acres of walls, destitute alike of historical value or of living interest, and only yielding the last and most garbled forms of the national religion. It is needless for me to describe the style of these well-known buildings, or their Art. Dendera, Edfou, Esneh, and Philæ have done duty in past days as the types of Egyptian Art, and we are all familiar with their details of palm leaf and lotus capitals, or four faces of Hat-hor beneath a cubic block, with their weak and mechanical style, their simpering faces, and endless repetitions of one ornament or figure. Thus perished an art which had lasted in various forms for thousands of years, beginning in the highest and most life-like style, then flooded by Asiatic monstrosities and gloom, reviving again in a Renaissance, and finally fossilised in its union with the decaying period of Greek Art.

A few words should be given to the means with which such stupendous results were accomplished. The hardness of the stones employed, and yet the brilliancy of the execution, has long been a source of wonder; and Brugsch says of Khafra's statue in diorite, that "No master of modern times is capable of giving an answer to the question how they managed to overcome the difficulties of the

unyielding substance." Hence, when, during my stay at Gizeh, I found indications of the methods which had been adopted, and these accumulated month by month in my hands, it was yet some time before I felt fully the force of the evidence. At last now the conclusions that have been arrived at are that the Egyptians, in the earliest times we know of, at the beginning of the Old Kingdom, habitually used jewelled saws, jewelled tube drills, jewelled circular saws, and jewelled lathe tools; that with these tools of bronze, set with corundum, or possibly diamond, they cut as fearlessly and rapidly through quartz and granite as a modern carpenter cuts a piece of oak with a handsaw; and that they completely anticipated and went beyond our modern invention of diamond rock-drilling. In these conclusions I am confirmed by the agreement of well-known civil engineers accustomed to such work; and, as one of them said, "A man nowadays would be proud to turn out such a granite core from his tube-drilling as this ancient one, and would exhibit it as a specimen." Yet this splendid work was habitually employed in carving all the sarcophagi and statues of the early period, and was even used in sawing a great pavement of basalt blocks about the third of an acre in area.

Finally, another subject of amazement has been the vast extent of the Egyptian remains, the amount of labour involved, and the grinding down of the population, which has always been supposed requisite in such works. But Egypt is not like other lands, and it contains the solution of this problem within itself. When it is considered that for all the great buildings the stones must have been transported during the inundation, in order for them to reach the spot required without a great amount of land-carriage; and when we see that the population of Egypt is without work during this time of the inundation, since the whole cultivable land is covered by water, and that man and beast merely remain at home or wander in the desert for three months of the year, the mystery seems so simply solved that it seems strange that it ever arose. For the greatest piece of work ever executed in Egypt, the Great Pyramid, it would suffice to draft but one man in six from the idle hands during the high Nile in order to build it easily in the time recorded, and Herodotus gives us

the hint when he says that the levies only worked three months at a time. Hence, then, from the climatic conditions of the country—that all ordinary labour is suspended during a quarter of the year, and that during that time water carriage to any part of the plain can be freely obtained—it is seen that Egypt is, by its nature, the land of huge buildings; and, in fact, the size of the architecture, as well as the style of the Art, are both alike the products of the essential features of the land itself. Such are some of the results of a study of the “Arts of Ancient Egypt.”



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“What is alleged to be the oldest of ancient British monuments has, perhaps, never been accurately measured by any one except the author of this work.

“Mr. Flinders Petrie has started on his investigation without any prejudices in favour either of the Druidical origin of Stonehenge or of Mr. Fergusson’s plausible and probable theory that the date of its erection is not older than the time of the fights between the Britons and the Saxons, when King Arthur ruled the land.”—*St. James’s Gazette*.

“Mr. Flinders Petrie points out the method by which the stones were worked, and adds a careful examination and summary of the various theories as to the use and age of the rings, . . . and he adds detailed results of observations on the position of the Friar’s Heel, as regards the rising of the sun at midsummer.”—*Academy*.

“We think we may safely say that Mr. Flinders Petrie has thrown some new light on the subject, . . . and whatever there may be of fanciful speculation in the theories of others, he indulges in no such airy notions, but applies the severest logical and scientific tests. Thus, the well-known fact of the sun rising, on the longest day, immediately over the Friar’s Heel, as the spectator . . . looks along the Avenue, is carefully examined, and, by a series of astronomical calculations . . . the age of the building is shown.

“This is a book for archæologists, and for all who take an interest in our national antiquities.”—*Devizes and Wilts Advertiser*.

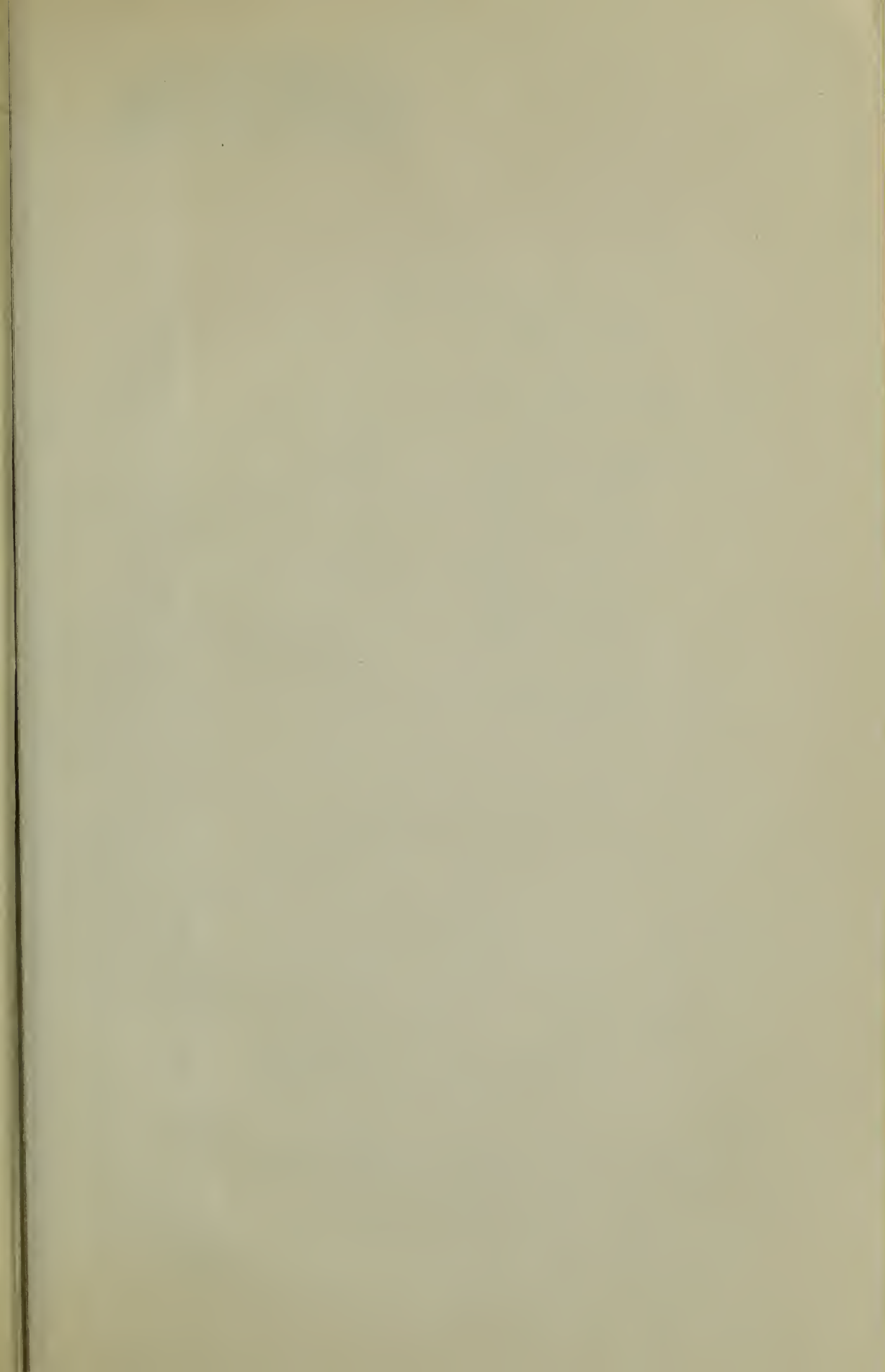


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